

Alabama First State Approved to Add Consumer-Directed Care Options to Medicaid State Plan

New "Personal Choices" Program Gives Consumers Choice and Flexibility

MONTGOMERY – Governor Bob Riley announced Thursday that Alabama is the first state to make consumer-directed care for Medicaid home and community-based services a permanent part of its State Plan. This change will enable nearly 700 older adults and people with disabilities in west Alabama to have greater flexibility and control over the delivery of their personal health care services, Governor Riley said.

Unlike waiver programs which must be renewed periodically, State Plan-approved services become a regular part of the Medicaid program and qualify for federal matching dollars.

"This important change makes consumer-directed care a reality for these individuals. It gives them more choices, more control and more options when it comes to their health care. Alabamians can be proud our state is leading the nation when it comes to providing greater consumer choice," said Governor Riley.

The Governor was notified Thursday that the state's "Personal Choices" program was approved by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services as an option for certain individuals in seven West Alabama counties. Those who are part of the Elderly and Disabled waiver and the State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) waiver home and community-based waiver programs are eligible to take part in Personal Choices. Beginning August 1, Personal Choices will be administered by the Alabama Department of Senior Services in Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, Pickens and Tuscaloosa counties. If successful, the agencies hope to expand it to qualifying recipients in other areas of the state. The program is a collaborative effort of the Alabama Medicaid Agency, the Alabama Department of Senior Services and the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.

Governor Riley commended Alabama Medicaid Commissioner Carol Steckel, Alabama Department of Senior Services Executive Director Irene Collins and Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services Commissioner Steve Shivers for their leadership and efforts to start the program and get it approved by CMS.

Alabama becomes the first state to take advantage of a provision in the federal Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005 allowing states to make program changes to help Medicaid recipients live independently in the community.

Under the Personal Choices program, individuals will be provided a monthly allowance from which they will determine what services they need. They may choose to hire

someone to help with their care or they may wish to save money for equipment purchases. Financial counselors will be available to guide them through the process which includes developing a budget to help manage the funds designated for their care. In the past, waiver participants were required to choose personal caregivers from a list of approved providers.

The new program is voluntary and will not cost more than the current system, Commissioner Steckel said. Instead it allows eligible Medicaid recipients to be responsible for funds that would have otherwise been spent on their behalf.

“This program is an example of how our agency is working to transform Medicaid by seeking out innovative, creative but cost-efficient ways to provide quality care for our recipients. It also is a continuation of our efforts to provide alternatives to institutional care for our elderly and disabled recipients,” she said.

Senior Services Director Collins pointed out that her agency received a grant in 2004 to develop the Personal Choices program. ADSS has worked with other state agencies and staff in the pilot area to make this program a reality.

“Greater consumer choice is a top priority for aging services across the nation. Alabama will now be a leader in providing those choices to our senior citizens,” Collins said. “Our staff has worked tirelessly to develop this innovative approach to long-term care and we look forward to helping the West Alabama Area Agency on Aging implement it.”

Commissioner Shivers of the Department of Rehabilitation Services said, “Our department has a long history of supporting and advocating for greater consumer choice. We’re proud to be a part of the Personal Choices program, which rightfully places control in the hands of those most affected.”

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For more information, contact the Governor’s Press Office at 334-242-7150.